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ABSTRACT

This study reports on parent reaction to the possibility of their elementary school age child having a student teacher in the classroom. Parents of children from six elementary schools in a midwestern city were randomly selected to answer a questionnaire. A usable return of 84 percent was achieved. Findings showed that an overwhelming majority of the parents surveyed were willing to have student teachers in their child's classroom if certain conditions were met. Parents needed assurance that their child would not be hindered in educational attainments and that the educational process would continue in an orderly manner with adequate supervision by the familiar classroom teachers. (PD)

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How Do Parents Feel About Student Teachers?

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How do parents react to the possibility of their elementary school age children having a student teacher in the classroom? This study attempted to ascertain the attitude of parents of elementary age children in one midwestern city.

Design: The sample used for this study is a midwestern city of approximately 25,000 population. The population of the city is ninety per cent white, three per cent black and seven per cent Mexican-American. The parents of children in the randomly selected classrooms of the six elementary schools in the city were asked to return a questionnaire in which they were to check a statement which indicated their opinion of their child being exposed to a student teacher. The definition for student teacher was supplied as an addendum to the questionnaire. Five hundred questionnaires were sent to the parents. A return of eighty four per cent (422 usable returns) was achieved after the third follow up letter.

Findings: The tabulation of parental opinion was as follows:

23% I strongly favor my child having a student teacher.

49% I favor my child having a student teacher.

19% Undecided or no opinion.

7% I prefer that my child not have a student teacher.

2% I am strongly opposed to my child having a student teacher.

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The comments that parents were invited to offer at the bottom of the questionnaire were interesting and revealing. With a very few exceptions the comments were favorable, or favorable with specific conditions, to having student teachers in the classroom. Typical favorable comments were:

1) "I think the more adults with the children the better."

2) "Yes, I favor having student teachers because the student teacher will have fresh ideas about teaching."

3) "Yes, it is a good idea. It will help the children as well as the student teacher."

4) "Yes, too many teachers never go back to school. The student teacher will bring in some fresh thinking."

Several parents commented that they were in favor of having a student teacher in their child's classroom if certain conditions were assured. These conditions revolved around the student teacher being able to teach the basic skills and to maintain discipline. Other parents were favorable to having student teachers if supervision from the classroom teacher and the university was adequate. Typical of these comments were:

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1) "Yes, but I want to make sure my child gets the necessary reading skills."

2) "Yes, if the classroom teacher is there when the children need her."

3) "I favor having a student teacher if she is a good one and can keep control of the class. Discipline is a problem."

4) "I am in favor of having student teachers but I would like to know more specific details, particularly about how reading would be taught."

Few of the parents expressing opposition to having student teachers made additional comments. Two isolated comments, which may or may not be typical of the thoughts of parents who opposed having student teachers, were:

1) "No, I don't want an untrained university student trying to teach my child to read."

2) "I don't want my child used to teach university students how to teach school."

Discussion: While an overwhelming majority of the parents surveyed were willing to have student teachers in their child's classroom there were conditions attending which should be considered by cooperating teachers, public school administrators and teacher education professors and administrators. Parents seem to need assurance that their child will not be hindered in his educational attainment, particularly in reading achievement, by having an inexperienced student teacher. Parents need assurance that the educational process will continue in an orderly manner with adequate supervision by the familiar classroom teacher. This survey suggests that, at least in this specific school district, the student teaching experience enjoys the trust of the elementary school children's parents. Implicit in this trust is an obligation by the teacher education institutions to adequately prepare and properly supervise their teacher candidates. The implied obligation of the cooperating public schools is to keep the parents well-informed and to assure the parents that the educational process will continue with order and effectiveness.